



University of Connecticut  
**OpenCommons@UConn**

---

NERA Conference Proceedings 2011

Northeastern Educational Research Association  
(NERA) Annual Conference

---

Fall 10-21-2011

# "It's a Process": An Initial Grounded Theory Framework for Success with Social Studies Simulations

Cory Wright-Maley

*University of Connecticut*, [cory.maley@uconn.edu](mailto:cory.maley@uconn.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [https://opencommons.uconn.edu/nera\\_2011](https://opencommons.uconn.edu/nera_2011)

 Part of the [Education Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Wright-Maley, Cory, "It's a Process": An Initial Grounded Theory Framework for Success with Social Studies Simulations" (2011).  
*NERA Conference Proceedings 2011*. 16.  
[https://opencommons.uconn.edu/nera\\_2011/16](https://opencommons.uconn.edu/nera_2011/16)

“It’s a Process”:

An initial grounded theory framework for success with social studies simulations

Cory Wright-Maley

Doctoral Candidate

University of Connecticut

Presented as a Poster at NERA, 2011

Joe: I'm not a big one [advocate of], you know tests. I mean standardized tests are standardized tests. And I don't know...how a score on tests tell if your kid can learn. I think Connecticut's better because it has writing. That's, I think that's better. It's here, we have to live with it, we have to work with it, but, you know what? How [do] you get a kid...I got a kid who is at below basic and he gets the [AYP] goal. That's impossible to get that much in one year. How did we get him to do that?

Joe and Peter are, in fact, quite successful with their students, though their success, at least in their eyes, has little to do with testing. The magnet school they teach at recruited them because of their reputation helping students to achieve. They have a variety of students from the suburbs and the inner city. Some of whom arrive on the first day of school designated as “below basic” based on their state-wide test scores. One would expect that “when we first get the kids...we would not make AYP with them.” And yet, each year that Peter and Joe have been teaching this school, their classes have met the AYP benchmarks. For Joe and Peter, simulations hold the key to their success. Over their decades of teaching, they have seen how simulations drive positive academic, affective, and social, outcomes for students<sup>1</sup>. This experience has led them to conclude that using simulations as the core feature of their curriculum “is the right approach” to teaching social studies in the middle school classroom.

It would, however, be overly simplistic to conclude that the mere existence of simulations in their curriculum is responsible for student outcomes. If this were the case teachers would simply need to abandon their curriculum and start teaching with simulations in order to affect similar outcomes. But simulations are notoriously difficult to use effectively. First, the use of simulations is considerably “more complex than [it] first appears and [requires] that the teacher

---

<sup>1</sup> The positive academic, affective, and social outcomes are the subject of another manuscript connected to this study.

fulfill a variety of roles” (Glavin, 2008, p. 115), shifting between instructive and facilitative roles (Gilley, 2004), and knowing when to let go of the reins. Simulations are also time intensive, not simply in terms of class time, but they require teachers dedicate additional up-front planning in order to anticipate the pitfalls of the simulation and the potentially winding directions in which students may take the simulation (Gilley, 2004). Moreover, teachers must ably transform learning objectives into scenarios that can approximate the reality of the phenomenon students are learning about without overwhelming students (Glavin, 2008).

Peter’s and Joe’s successful use of simulations provides an illustrative case of how to use non-traditional active learning in the middle school social studies classroom. But they acknowledge of their success that “it’s a process” and that simulations cannot simply be dropped into the curriculum without careful consideration. Thus, we are left with the question that drives this research: “How does the collaborative practice of two expert teachers help to inform best practices with simulations in a middle school social studies classroom?” In this paper I focus on the value added elements that Peter and Joe use to strengthen their impact on students in order to develop an emergent theory on how to use simulations for maximum impact.

### **Shifting away from traditional social studies**

Traditionally the social studies classroom is a place in which teachers lean heavily on uncomplicated narratives presented by texts, require students to engage in tasks that ask little in the way of intellectual challenge, and rely on pedagogies that transmit content directly from teachers to students (Cuban, 1991; Goodlad, 1984; Loewen, 2008; McNeil, 1986; Wade, 1993). Even when teachers articulate their aims to the contrary, their practice sometimes betrays actions

which serve to reinforce these entrenched trends (Thornton, 1994). Moreover, Levstik (2008) argued that this trend remains on track.

Researchers note that despite the prevalence of this trend, “wise,” “ambitious,” or “powerful” ways of teaching are beginning to emerge in social studies classrooms (Grant, 2003; 2005; Grant & Gradwell, 2010; Yeager & Davis, 2005), which demonstrate “a willingness” on the part of teachers “to craft opportunities for more powerful teaching and learning” (Grant, 2005, p. 125). For nearly two decades, the National Council of the Social Studies (NCSS) has called for “powerful and rigorous social studies curriculum” (2008; see also 1993). One of the ways teachers are answering this call is through the use of simulations in their classrooms. As such, researchers have recently begun to document the use of simulations as part of teachers’ powerful practices (e.g. Gradwell & DiCamillo, 2009; 2010; Webeck, Salinas, and Field, 2005).

### **Simulation as an Effective Pedagogy**

A number of studies have demonstrated the potential simulations hold for improving student learning outcomes in social studies classrooms. Both Mosborg, Parker, Bransford, Vye, & Merchant (2010), and Gradwell and DiCamillo (2009; 2010) found that the students in the classrooms they were studying, in which simulations were used regularly, outperformed their peers. Mosborg and associates conducted a study that examined the impact of problem-based learning with simulations across three AP courses at different schools – two high achieving schools (HAS) and a moderate achieving school (MAS); their study included a total of 314 students. One HAS, in which the simulation based curriculum was not employed, was used as the control. To test the outcomes, the AP exam and a study-specific *Complex Achievement Assessment* were used. The results demonstrated that AP test scores of students in the

experimental HAS were significantly higher than those of students who were in the control group at  $p < .05$ . Moreover, there were no significant differences between the scores from the traditionally lower scoring MAS and the control HAS. On the *Complex Achievement Assessment* the authors reported significantly higher scores for both the MAS and HAS in relation to the control. While this does not validate simulations per se, their findings speak directly against the claim that simulations take away from curricular rigor.

Research also indicates that simulations may have additional positive academic outcomes including increased student engagement (Gehlbach, Brown, Ioannou, Boyer, Hudson, Niv-Solomon, et al., 2008), increased student interest in subject matter and academic transfer (Ganzler, 2010), the potential to shift student dispositions (Williams & Williams, 2007), foster inquiry (Colella, 2000), and contribute to students’ inferential learning Gradwell and DiCamillo (2010). Thus, we know that simulations have the potential to positively impact students. However, we know surprisingly little about the process through which simulations can be leveraged for maximum impact on student outcomes.

The purpose of this research was to examine the beliefs that two veteran teachers who co-teach middle school social studies/English have about simulations and how their professional practices with simulations highlight the promises for, and challenges of using simulations in the social studies classroom. Among the key findings is an emergent framework that describes the process by which my participants attempt to maximize the impact that simulations have on their students.

## **Theoretical Framework**

Scholars have long understood that teachers’ beliefs hold a strong influence on the learning and practice of pre-service and in-service teachers (Lortie, 1975; Nespor, 1987). As Kagan (1992) remarked in her work on teacher beliefs, "the more one reads studies of teacher belief, the more strongly one suspects that this piebald of personal knowledge lies at the very heart of teaching" (in Pajares, 1992, p. 329). Nespor (1987) suggests that in order to understand teachers’ pedagogical choices we “must pay much more attention to the goals they pursue...and to their subjective interpretations of classroom processes” (p. 326).

Teachers’ beliefs are considered a “messy construct” (Pajares, 1992); however, Pajares contends that beliefs are not as messy as they appear when scholars take care to define what they mean by beliefs precisely and use the term so that its meaning is “consistently understood and adhered to” (p. 329). Thus, a clear operational definition is necessary. Nespor (1987) argued in his seminal study on teacher beliefs that beliefs are “conceptual systems” used to explain a “domain of activity” and may serve to include or exclude information belonging the domain in question (p.326). Ruys, Van Keer, Aelterman (2010), in turn, defined teacher beliefs as “a set of representations guiding their [teachers’] concept of learning and instruction and their role in that process” (p. 539). I will integrate both of the above conceptions of beliefs. For the purposes of this study I am defining teacher beliefs as the conceptual system of teaching and learning which teachers use to explain and direct their teaching practice.

## **Methods**

### **Data Collection**

To understand how experienced middle school social studies teachers perceive the purpose and value of simulations in their practice I used a qualitative research design, employing

a basic interpretive approach to research (Merriam, 2009) which draws from phenomenology (e.g. Seidman, 2006). This approach derives meaning from the participants’ perceptions of the phenomena (Bogdan & Bilkin, 1998) as well as from the participants’ everyday experiences of the phenomena (Van Manen, 1990). To collect the data I adapted the approach to the interviews from Seidman’s (2006) three-interview protocol, in which the first interview acted to provide contextual about the teaching environment as well as participants’ beliefs about teaching and learning; the second interview asked participants to think specifically about how they use a particular simulation as part of their practice; finally, the third interview, which incorporated a concept mapping exercise, was used to engage participants in reflective thinking about their practice with simulations. The concept map was used to elucidate their thinking about one simulation and the elements they consider to be constituent parts of that simulation.

### **Data Analysis**

I used a grounded theory approach to data analysis. I began with an inductive analysis during which I employed open-coding to allow patterns and themes to emerge from the data (Strauss and Corbin, 1998; Ruona, 2005). I applied constant comparison of the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) both across interviews with the same participant and across participants in order to develop categories and to support the creation of a substantive theory of the effective use of simulations (Grbich, 2009; Harry, Sturges, and Klingner, 2005). I worked to arrange codes around emerging categories, grouping “discrete codes according to conceptual categories that [reflected] commonalities among codes” (Harry, et al., 2005, 5). After doing so, I assembled categories into groups according to commonalities that emerged from those categories.



Throughout this initial process, I wrote memos in order to document my thought process as I reassembled the data (Corbin and Strauss, 1990). These memos helped to clarify the theory development process as I revisited the data, codes, categories, and themes. Finally I discarded the original themes I had developed started with fresh eyes to reorganize the categories. As a result of this reorganization, new families of categories emerged which helped me to “weave the fractured story back together” (Glaser, 1978, 72). A variety of checks on reliability were employed, including the use of peer debriefers (Thomas, 2006), member checking (Creswell & Miller, 2000), memoing (Corbin and Strauss, 1990), and searching for disconfirming evidence (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

In order to assess the veracity of my analysis, I tested the themes by a number of means. First, I returned to the data and looked across data sources to ensure that the themes occurred across multiple data sources and for both participants (Harry, et al., 2005). Second, I tested the themes with the participants using a card sort activity (Harry, et al., 2005). After developing the themes I asked participants to sort cards that displayed the elements of simulations I identified as “basic execution” and “going the extra mile” (see Figure 1). These cards were shuffled and provided to participants. I prompted my participants to sort cards into two categories: First, one set represented basic elements that they “might find in a textbook about the steps to execute a simulation” and the other set represented the elements they believe “go the extra mile,” as if they “were to write a textbook on using simulations.” Participants discussed the cards together before agreeing on their conclusions. Only one element was in contention, namely “showcasing students.” One participant felt that students’ performance of a simulation in class was a form of showcasing could be considered a basic element; however, showcasing the simulation to those not normally part of the classroom (i.e. parents, administrators, members of the community)

would push it into the “extra mile” pile. My participants decided ultimately that it belonged in the extra mile group, but at their suggestion the element was changed to “publically showcase students” for the sake of clarity. Their final conclusions matched my own. Finally, the narrative account was provided to my participants to check for accuracy of my findings and conclusions.

### **Participants & Setting**

I selected my participants purposefully to reflect several criteria: First, that they had multiple years of social studies teaching experience at the secondary level; second, that they had multiple years of experience using simulations; third, that they had created or adapted a simulation for their specific teaching needs; and fourth, that they had used at least one simulation during the past school year. Both participants met these criteria.

Joe has taught social studies for 32 years, and his partner, Peter, has taught English for 27 years. For “at least the last 20 years” they have taught their classes collaboratively. Although Peter is an English teacher and not officially a social studies teacher, he and Joe have constructed their class as a writing intensive social studies class. Currently they teach 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade classes that combine social studies and English components at Central Academy. In effect, they co-teach two double-sized classes, one 7<sup>th</sup> grade and one 8<sup>th</sup> grade that follows a history-based curriculum that is deeply infused with reading and writing.

Central Academy is a magnet middle/high school serving grades 7-12 located in a midsize urban city in Connecticut. Students who wish to attend the school apply to the school through a lottery, and come to the school from a variety of urban and suburban neighborhoods. As such, the school serves a diverse population of students in terms of ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and level of educational readiness; Approximately 75% of Central Academy’s students

are minorities, landing it in the top quartile for minority students in the state. Moreover 45% of students qualify for free and reduced lunch. The classes Peter and Joe teach are heterogeneously grouped and thus represent the diversity present in the school at large.

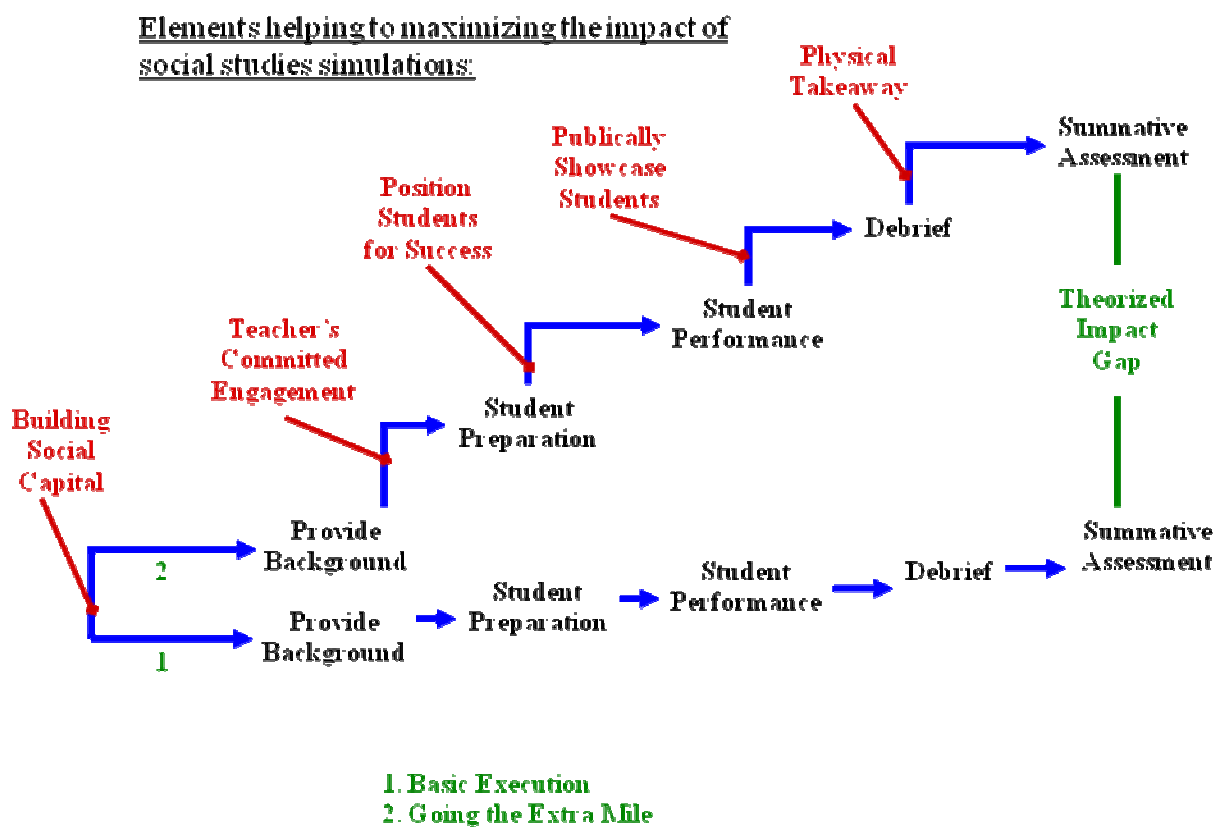
### **Emergent Theory**

In my work with simulations I have found that simulations have five basic elements, which I consider part of their basic execution: (1) Providing background content knowledge to students (Druckman & Ebner, 2008; Hess, 1998; Kriz, 2010); (2) Preparation, which could include students learning their roles, developing their understanding of how the simulation works, and how they can make the best use of the content for their particular role or task within the simulation (Smith & Boyer, 1996); (3) The student performance of the simulation itself; (4) Debriefing the experience and lessons connected to the simulation (Butler, 1988; Kriz, 2010; Smith & Boyer, 1996); and (5) Assessment of learning resulting from the simulation (Hess, 1998) (see Figure 1). I refer to the aforementioned elements as basic because I consider this sequence foundational, one which does not extend beyond what one might consider the necessary aspects of a simulation’s execution.

Peter and Joe are already engaging in these basic elements of the simulation, but what I believe to be of more interest is what they are doing beyond the abovementioned elements. My analysis revealed a number of value-added contributions they describe which go beyond the basic execution of a simulation. I will refer to these contributions as ‘going the extra mile’ (see Figure 1). These steps may help to elucidate some of the pedagogical elements that they believe are necessary to enact a simulation in the social studies classroom such that its impact on

students is maximized. They include: (1) Building social capital - developing strong relationships with students and marshalling support from other teachers and administrators; (2) The teachers’ committed engagement in the process of building content background for students; (3) Positioning students for success during the preparation process; (5) Publically showcasing student performances; and (6) A physical takeaway – a memento, award, or keepsake – for students to take home. I would like to note that although this is the sequence in which Joe and Peter employed the abovementioned elements; however, it is conceivable that some of these elements may be interchangeable.

Figure 1:



**Building social capital:**

Joe and Peter argue that using simulations is part of an important process of relationship building because simulations require teachers to build trust with their students in order to use them effectively. This is a process my participants begin at the start of the school year (and continues for the two years that they teach their students). Peter explained that “we’re pretty successful” and that he and Joe are able to use simulations with success “because of connections that we start [on] day one with the kids, making connections with them and letting them know that they are loved and no matter what they do, [that] we’re still gonna love them, but they have to come into the fold.” He went on to say, “it’s all about connecting with the kid as a person before you can teach the content, you have to know the person.” Joe, too, echoed this point. He related how another teacher beseeched them to do their 1776 simulation during the first weeks of school because of the positive impact she saw it having on their students. In reply he stated: “The first week’s not going to do it because we are building relationships with them. We’re doing things, we’re trying to get them to understand that...that they’re okay, that we accept them the way they are and they’re okay and that. But we’re also trying to show them that, trust us....I mean we have to build that trust.”

Likewise, teachers have to build up a “little social capital” and develop “a little trust from, from those [colleagues] around you.” Because so much of the work in simulations is independent, and at least in the case of my participants, sprawls beyond the boundaries of the classroom, developing rapport with one’s colleagues “is crucial”. For the same reason, “you also have to have support from administration. And they have to be [able to] trust you to know, okay you can have your kids out at twenty different locations, but you’re going to know what your kids are doing in those twenty different locations.” Because simulations may still be considered an unorthodox approach to teaching, one’s colleagues may be skeptical of this pedagogical

approach. Some of my participants colleagues still tell them that their teaching is all just “fun and games” and believe their approach is “not rigorous enough”. Thus, it may be that teachers may need to ensure that other teachers and administrators trust their judgment both pedagogically and in terms of management in order to offer students the necessary space to get the most out of their experiences.

**Teacher’s committed engagement:**

My participants admit that for their approach to simulations “there’s nothing that’s ever done [on a] small basis....We both like to make it special for the kids, so that means you have to get out the bells and whistles and make it special.” Joe explains that he and Peter will do “whatever it takes”. Using the John Brown trial as an example, both participants described how they’ll argue vociferously about John Brown’s sanity in front of class. They will sing “*John Brown Lies a Moldering in the Grave*; and maybe [we’ll] march through the school singing it.” Joe noted that he and Peter are “the worst singers” and “we make sure we are so offbeat, because the kids gotta laugh at you” because “we’re so nuts about making fun of ourselves that they [students] feel comfortable making fools of themselves.”

In addition to hamming it up, Peter and Joe provide students with costumes, fake beards, and other accoutrements, which may add to the mystique for students, as well as making sure that students have ample access to academic resources related to the simulation for them to explore further. Joe has built a shed at home to house the costumes for all of the different simulations they use. Why do they go to such trouble? For my participants it is not enough to apply the pedagogy; Peter told me “they have to see you’re excited about it and that you believe in it” and that if “you’re just going through the paces, [students will] go through the paces with

you”. Thus, teachers’ committed engagement with simulations, may be a key ingredient to building the momentum necessary for students to feel fully engaged and committed as well.

### **Positioning students for success:**

Rather than leading from the front during the entire simulation, my participants step back from their role at “the center of chaos” in order to allow students more autonomy as they prepare for the simulation itself. Peter says “my role is...facilitator, spectator, cheerleader, [and] corrector if it needs to be done.” He likes to “sit back and watch the activities and then get up and go from group to group.” Moreover, he sees his role “as a thief, too” borrowing work and ideas from the groups of students who are off and running to help jump start those that may have stalled in their progress. Likewise, Joe sees himself maneuvering throughout the classroom, but takes on a slightly different role, namely making sure he is “getting materials and...books on [the topic]” as well as helping them choose appropriate costumes so that “kids can get interested” in the simulation or their role within it.

More importantly, however, is their task of “positioning students for success”. For some students, that may mean a student “who can memorize the whole book” may push his limits as much as the student who may only deliver a single line during the performance. As Peter says, “you know a low-level kid like Ferdinand...who pounds the gavel and he goes, ‘Quiet woman!’ Well that probably was his only part that he's done, but it was major to him to be able to get that far.” Joe highlights the fact that “Peter and I take all kids. We don’t say we don’t want a kid that has a disability.” They had a student with “cerebral palsy [who] couldn’t speak;” in order to position that student for success, “we had a person read the lines and he’d press the tape recorder...when he wanted to speak.” Although this student’s disability a notable one, Peter is

clear that this applies to all of their students: “The traditional learner is untraditional today...so each kid is going to approach things differently.” Their role, then, is to “take kids at any level and we’ll put them in a spot where they can be successful with material and make them feel as good about that.” Thus the facilitative role of the teacher to successfully weave their students into the simulation may be crucial to the success of simulations in a diverse classroom.

### **Showcasing student performances:**

Joe and Peter believe it is important to showcase their students publically. Joe made it clear “we want to get our kids in front of people” because it shows students “in action” in a way that “shows that they’re learning in class, that they’re learning at a higher level.” They regularly invite parents to come see their sons and daughters perform, and often have administrators come in not only to watch, but to participate. Peter discussed how the principal and vice principal lead the British and patriot forces in their Battle of Bunker Hill simulation, which took place on the lawn of the capitol building. The public nature of their performances is quickly becoming a regular occurrence. To point to another example, they recently performed their John Brown trial at the local court house in town. Peter argues that public performances increase the pressure on him and Joe, but that it is worthwhile “because it made it extra special for the kids. They’re out in the public eye and they did us proud”.

With several students from troubled backgrounds, their open door policy also allows them to show their students in a different light. Joe related one such event; a students’ parole officer happened to come by in time to see one of the performances: “He came up, the parole officer, to see him. And he said ‘it’s just amazing what he just did!’ Joe continued, “here I was able to show him off to his parole office, and changed that parole officer’s point of view, that he



is not another thug, that he’s a person and that he does have – look at what he did!” Thus, while the stakes are high for Peter and Joe with these public performances, the stakes are raised for their students too. Peter speculated thusly, “I think [public performance] invigorates students. They are excited that people are coming to see them. They are excited to strut their stuff...to show others what they can do.” While it is beyond the scope of the study to say conclusively, it is possible that the public nature of the performances also increases the effort students put into simulations, thereby accentuating impact it may have upon them.

**The physical takeaway:**

Joe discussed with me the fact that they heavily adapt a lot of their simulations from prepackaged simulations. When I asked Joe what, if anything these simulations “miss the mark on,” he replied, “there has to be something at the end that [students] need to take away with them physically....I don’t ever remember seeing that on any of the simulations.” Peter and Joe frequently have commemorative coins, such as those connected to their Lewis & Clarke simulation, stamps, photographs, bookmarks, and other such keepsakes for students to take home with them when the simulation is through. Joe told me “it’s a way to pass on history, and we do that with a lot of our simulations.” He says it gives his students something to pass down from “generation to generation,” and that “kids save [that coin]...we have that kid...who’s written off – he has everything hanging on his wall.” For Peter, he believes that the keepsakes give students “something to hang on [conceptually], that they can build off in other directions”.

It is not only mementos, but also the recognition students receive both at school and at home. Following their simulations, my participants award students with certificates. Peter told me “you name it, we’ll do a certificate for it.” As an example, Peter discussed their newly added

award for best death scene in their Battle of Bunker Hill simulation: “Some kids, we have some kids that are acting out, and they're very melodramatic; it just makes it a little more fun.” Joe had a very personal connection to this aspect of their practice, telling me about how the basketball award he won as a young man helped him succeed despite losing an eye at an early age: “This stupid little plaque got me to do it. But, you know, I realize [now] that it was the journey not the plaque. But I needed something to get me to go on the journey.” He later told me, “people need to feel important...and that’s what [the certificates] do....They feel important; they get called up to get recognized.” At home these keepsakes may instigate another round of recognition. Joe and Peter make copies of the video for each student to take away with them, noting that “anything positive that we can share with parents is always good. So them bringing the video home, and the grandparents always want to see that.” Thus, Peter and Joe offer multiple potential physical takeaways for teachers to consider – the mementos, award certificates, and video of their participation. Such keepsakes may all serve to increase the sense in students that there is something tangible to be gained from their engagement in the simulation.

### **Conclusions & Implications**

The development of a theory on the successful use of simulations, even in a single case study such as this, is an important first step to understanding how teachers are using complex teaching methods in their classrooms in order to craft more enriching learning experiences for their students. To be sure, a single case can only be the starting point for more extensive research; however, the collaborative practice of Joe and Peter helps to illuminate features of their successful practice that may help to shape our understanding of how to make simulations a more successful endeavor for students. By building upon a base of strong relationships with students,

administrators, and other teachers, and by girding their practice with their committed engagement, efforts to position students for success, public displays of students’ performances, and provision of physical takeaways, may help to increase the potential simulations have to impact students positively.

Theoretically speaking it is possible that the effective integration of the above elements may result in an impact gap between the basic execution of the simulation and the approach which tasks teachers to go the extra mile. To highlight that practice, Peter and Joe have dedicated effort toward building strong relationships with their students prior to using simulations with them, and have worked to develop a strong base of support from administrators and other teachers. They also approach their practice with exuberance, stating that “you have to believe in what you're doing” and that you must approach simulations with zeal. My participants also demonstrate their willingness to shift their role, to one where they are “positioning students for success” rather than leading the class. Glavin (2008) found that teachers may have difficulty letting go of their command position during this process; thus, Joe’s and Peter’s ability to do so may be one reason for their success.

Publically showcasing student performances also plays a key role for them in helping them to bring out the best in their students, and for outsiders to see their students in a different light. From a practical point of view, however, it may not always be possible (or desirable to showcase students for simulations which are of short duration. Nevertheless, public performances, as discussed in this paper, may serve to demonstrate to students that their work is of value, and not simply an abstract intellectual exercise. The sense that students’ efforts are meaningful may have connections to the final aspect discussed in this paper, the physical

takeaway in as much as it allows students to feel that there is an outcome beyond the work that is connected to their learning. In Joe’s and Peter’s view, the ability for students to take something physical away from the simulation may help to create the conceptual hook, but also, perhaps, a conceptual beacon that may serve to focus them on a tangible outcome.

Similar to other researchers (e.g. Gradwell & DiCamillo, 2009; 2010; Mosborg, et.al, 2010), my participants’ students have succeeded in meeting AYP goals on the CMTs. Unlike some states, which do test social studies, Connecticut does not, and yet Peter and Joe believe that their students were able to transfer their learning into success on the English CMTs. Their assertion speaks to the findings presented by Ganzler (2010) which demonstrated that students were able to transfer their learning during simulations into their other coursework.

While they have been successful in achieving their AYP benchmarks, the school’s results demonstrate that student achievement at Central Academy, both overall and among sub-groups, is in line with state averages. Thus, it may be difficult to conclude that simulations are more successful at promoting academic gains. It should be clear, however, that Peter and Joe consider the test scores a minor part of what they are trying to achieve. Their efforts to help their students to express themselves confidently, and to engage students as critical consumers of history lies at the heart of what they aim to do in their practice; Connecticut’s CMT measure neither of these.

Moreover, the their test score results may be considered as indications that simulations can be employed regularly without impacting scores negatively, which may help to allay the concern that time consuming activities such as simulations will do just that. The findings of this study further reinforce similar conclusions presented by others (e.g., Gradwell & DiCamillo, 2009; 2010; Mosborg, et.al, 2010).

Problematically, simulations remain a difficult pedagogy to use. Simulations, perhaps to a greater extent than other pedagogies, require that teachers plan the simulation such that it meets curriculum objectives through scenarios that can approximate the reality of the phenomenon students are learning, rather than deliver those objectives through direct, or at least more teacher-directed instruction. Moreover, they need to be able to do so without overwhelming students. As Glavin (2008) points out, teachers must “create an environment that will stretch the learners but will not break them” (p. 119). Like my participants, Gilley (2004), argues that teachers must be capable of effectively switching from teacher driven instruction to facilitation, making using simulations “more complex than first [it] appears” (Glavin, 2008, p. 115). This may explain why, at least anecdotally, so few teachers appear to use simulations in any regularly occurring manner. Thus it may be that teachers lack a sense of efficacy when it comes to using this complex pedagogy.

Peter and Joe also have access to resources they have collected over several decades of teaching, spending money out of their own pockets to acquire them. Moreover their co-teaching approach may lend itself more to the use of simulations because they have more time to go into depth than do other teachers who may not have that luxury. Thus the application of the “going the extra mile” trajectory to the use of simulations may not be easily replicable for teachers with more traditional circumstances; in isolation, some elements may be difficult for teachers to employ; With this said, each of the elements described in this paper are conceptualized as independent and value-added, rather than as dependent upon the previous element. Therefore, other actions teachers could undertake such as the provision of certificates, scheduling performances for parents, or developing rapport with teachers and administrators are well within

the grasp of most teachers willing to put in the effort to do so. The effect of these steps may be to improve the impact simulations can have on students.

As such, the implications of this framework, though belonging to a single case, are nevertheless important for teachers and teacher educators. By providing a glimpse at the beliefs and experiences of two expert teachers, and illuminating how they enact simulations successfully in their classroom, may help to address issues of teacher efficacy when it comes to using simulations. A number of the features of their practice could serve as a first step toward identifying what mastery of practice with simulations looks like. By using this study’s findings as a point of departure, educational researchers may be able to draw more conclusive answers from future research. Resulting from an emergent literature, teacher educators may be able to better facilitate preservice/in-service teacher learning around the use of simulations in the social studies classroom. Further, additional research into the impact that the effective use of simulations may have on student learning outcomes may hold implications for policy makers to consider more active curricula, such as simulations, as a way to means by which to improve educational outcomes.

### Sources Cited

- Bodgan, R.C., & Biklen, S.K. (1992). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theories and methods*. Boston: Pearson.
- Butler, J. T. (1988). Games and simulations: Creative educational alternatives. *TechTrends*, 33(4), 20-23.
- Collela, V. (2000). Participatory simulations: Building collaborative understanding through immersive dynamic modeling. *The journal of the learning sciences*, 9(4), 471-500.
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. L. (1990). Grounded theory research: Procedures, canons, and evaluative criteria. *Qualitative Sociology*, 13, 3-21.
- Creswell, J. W., & Miller, D. L. (2000). Determining validity in qualitative inquiry. *Theory Into Practice*, 39(3), 124. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.
- Cuban, L. (1991). History of teaching in social studies. In J. Shaver (Ed.), *Handbook of research on social studies teaching and learning* (pp. 197–209). New York, NY: Macmillan.
- Druckman, D., & Ebner, N. (2008). Onstage or behind the scenes? relative learning benefits of simulation role-play and design. *Simulation & Gaming*, 39(4), 465-497.
- Ganzler, L. (2010). Simulated citizen: How students experienced a semester length legislative simulation (Doctoral dissertation, Boston College, 2001). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 62, 7741A.
- Gehlback, H., Brown, S. W., Ioannou, A., Boyer, M., Hudson, N., Niv-Solomaon, A., Maneggia, D., & Janik, L. (2008). Increasing interest in social studies: Social perspective taking and self-efficacy in stimulating simulations. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 33(4), 894-914.
- Gilley, J.W. (2004). Demonstration and simulation. In M.W. Galbraith. *Adult learning methods: A guide for effective instruction*, (3rd ed., pp.361-381). Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing
- Glaser, B.G., & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory*. Chicago: Adeline.
- Glavin, R. (2008). Developing your teaching role in a simulation center. In R.H. Riley. *Manual of simulation in healthcare*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Goodlad, J. I. (1984). *A place called school: Prospects for the future*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Gradwell, J, & DiCamillo, L. (2009, Nov.). *Using simulations to teach history in an age of accountability: “It’s the engine that drives the course”*. Paper presented at the meeting of The College and University Faculty Assembly, Atlanta, GA.

Gradwell, J. & DiCamillo, L. (2010, Nov). *Examining two middle school teachers’ purposes for using historical simulations*. Paper presented at the meeting of The College and University Faculty Assembly, Denver, CO.

Grant, S. G. (2003). *History lessons: Teaching, learning, and testing in U. S. high school classrooms*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Grant, S.G. (2005) More journey than an end: A case study of ambitious teaching. In E. A. Yeager & O. L. Davis Jr. (Eds.), *Wise social studies teaching in an age of high-stakes testing* (pp. 89–105). Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing.

Grant, S.G., & Gradwell, J.M. (Eds.) (2010). *Teaching history with big ideas: cases of ambitious teachers*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Education.

Grbich, C. (2009). *Qualitative data analysis: An introduction*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Harry, B. Sturges, K.M., & Klingner, J.K. (2005). Mapping the Process: An Exemplar of Process and Challenge in Grounded Theory Analysis. *Educational Researcher*, 34 (2), 3–13.

Hess, F. M. (1998). Some practical thoughts on the design and use of social studies simulations. *OCSS Review*, 34(1), 48-56.

Kagan, D.M. (1992). Implications of research on teacher belief. *Educational Psychologist*, 27, 65-90.

Kriz, W. C. (2010). A systemic-constructivist approach to the facilitation and debriefing of simulations and games. *Simulation & Gaming*, 41(5), 663-680.

Levstik, L.S. (2008). What happens in social studies classrooms? Research on K-12 social studies education. In L.S. Levstik & C.A. Tyson (Eds.) *Handbook of research in social studies education*. New York: Routledge. Pp. 50-62.

Loewen, J.W. (2008). *Lies my teacher told me: Everything your American history book got wrong*. New York, NY: The New Press.

Lortie, D.C. (1975). *School Teacher*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

McNeil, L. M. (1986). *Contradictions of control: School structure and school knowledge*. New York, NY: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Merriam, S.B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: A source book of new methods* (2nd ed.). London: Sage.

Mosborg, S., Parker, W.C., Bransford, J., Vye, N., Merchant, N. (2010). Rethinking advanced high school coursework: Tackling the depth/breadth tension in the AP U.S. government and



*politics* course. Paper presented at The American Educational Research Association. *Denver, CO*.

National Council for the Social Studies (1993). 37th House of Delegates Assembly. *Social Education*, 58, 199-205.

National Council for the Social Studies. (2008). A vision of powerful teaching and learning in the social studies: building social understanding and civic efficacy: A position statement of national council for the social studies. Accessed from < <http://www.socialstudies.org/positions/powerful>> on 7/30/11.

Nespor, J.K. (1987). The role of beliefs in teaching practice. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 19(4), 317-328.

Pajares, M. (1992). Teachers' beliefs and educational research: Cleaning up a messy construct. *Review of Educational Research*, 62, 307-332.

Ruona, W.E.A. (2005). Analyzing qualitative data. In R.A. Swanson & E.F. Holton (Eds.) *Research in organizations: Foundations and methods of inquiry*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Ruys, I., Van Keer, H., Aelterman, A. (2010). Collaborative learning in pre-service teacher education: An exploratory study on related conceptions, self-efficacy and implementation. *Educational Studies*, 36(5), 537-553.

Seidman, I.E. (2006) *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Smith, E. T., & Boyer, M. A. (1996). Designing in-class simulations. *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 29(4), 690-94.

Strauss, A. L., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Thomas, D.R. (2006). A general inductive approach for analyzing qualitative evaluation data. *American Journal of Evaluation* 27, 237-246.

Thornton, S.J. (1994). The social studies near century's end: Reconsidering patterns of curriculum and instruction. *Review of Research in Education*, 20, pp. 223-254.

Van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching lived experience: Human science for and action sensitive pedagogy*. New York, NY: State University of New York.

Wade, Rahima C. 1993. "Content Analysis of Social Studies Textbooks: A Review of Ten Years of Research." *Theory and Research in Social Education* 21, no. 3: 232-56. *ERIC*, EBSCOhost (accessed November 8, 2010).

Webeck, M.L., Salinas, C.S., and Field, S.L. (2005). A good teacher in Texas: Conversations about Wisdom in Middle School Social Studies Practice.

Williams, R.H. and Williams, A.J. (2007): In pursuit of peace: Attitudinal and behavioral change with simulations and multiple identification theory. *Simulation & Gaming*, 38(4), 453-71.

Wineburg, S. (2001). Historical thinking and other unnatural acts: Charting the future of teaching the past. Peteradelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Yeager, E.A. & Davis, O.L. Jr. (Eds.) (2005). *Wise social studies teaching in an age of high-stakes testing*. Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing.